

A Brief Escape from Clarendon Hill

Psychiatric House

Raury, Now

Raury considered that his friendship with Creed wasn't very significant by measure of time, but then again, he didn't consider time to be the most significant measure of his friendships. In his current, or rather *recent*, residence at the Clarendon Hill Insane Asylum (now called the Clarendon Hill Psychiatric House in an official capacity and still referred to as just "the asylum" or slangily "the 'sylum" in a locals-being-insensitive capacity) the amount of time you spent with someone meant even less. It had to, because you didn't spend much time with any of your peers, not one-on-one at least, at Clarendon Hill. Instead, small gestures carried a lot of weight. Before Creed, Raury's closest friend there was an older guy named Feldspar that gave him his chocolate mint pudding at lunch once in a while. Feld's pudding was mint, but his English was not. For all Raury knew, one of his closest friends was a mute—they'd barely ever spoken a word to each other. Raury considered how much he would miss those moments of unspoken understanding and bonding with a relative stranger. Quite a lot, actually. Maybe Creed would learn to respect and appreciate a good silence, or maybe they'd go their separate ways in the end anyway.

Raury considered that once he began spending more of his cafeteria time (one of the few, and by far the most substantial, daily socialization opportunities at Clarendon Hill) with Creed and less of it with Feldspar, his life had become increasingly exciting and, now that that excitement had reached a crescendo, chaotic. Raury considered the first thing Creed ever said to him with his jagged mouth that looked accustomed to, and uncomfortable without, some sort of vice in it. "You're an absurdly tall guy. I think we're going to get along." *He was planning this since the moment he walked into that place.*

Raury considered that his wiry, spastic companion seemed like more of a fight than a flight kind of guy, but that right now he was proving rather adept at the latter.

Raury considered all of these things, but not until later on. Right now, his own flight response was pumping him full of blinding adrenaline that only left room to consider *run run run*. Right now, it was hard to think about anything except the distant sirens and spotlights whose singular purpose was to close that distance on him and his most significant friend. *I haven't known Creed for a very long time. I don't really know this guy. Oh god, what have I done?*

He had escaped the Clarendon Hill Psychiatric House in the dead of night. He had helped at least a dozen others escape alongside the breakout's key orchestrator, Creed. He had done these things because he was tall enough to reach and disable the facility's sparse and unsophisticated security cameras, because he had been utterly sweet talked into doing them, and because the taste of freedom had sounded so appetizing. As he fled

into rural northern Vermont, freedom tasted hot, metallic, and not unlike that afternoon's lunch entertaining its own escape plan.

Raury, Creed and the others agreed to split up once they were out. It would be harder to track them down that way. They figured if they moved fast enough, spread-toothin local officials way up here in Northern Nowhere, Vermont couldn't possibly catch them all. Raury and Creed, the two of them sticking together, headed northeast of Clarendon Hill in the direction of some of the countryside's expansive, scattered farmlands that were sprinkled here and there between an otherwise woody, mountainous landscape. There was no grand rationale to this, but their options were limited and *go! go! go!* held precedence over *where? where? where?* in the distressed, hurried state of mind that had afflicted Raury in the heat of things.

"Look," Creed panted, hands on his knees as he finally came to a stop under the extensive concealment of an evergreen forest after hours of fast-paced, pinball-like maneuvering. The searching sirens and spotlights were a dull backdrop to the evening now; the light of the moon and the buzzing of insects had become more prominent than those, and that afforded them a break. "We're headed to Canada. We'll keep it low key there for a while. Get under-the-table handy work. Split a place. Yeah, we'll be alright." He forced a reassuring smile but the sweat, blood, dirt, and strain polluting his face weren't fooling Raury into a sense of comfort quite yet.

"Oh," Raury said. "I didn't realize we had a plan."

“I couldn’t talk about it until we were in the clear and long split from everyone else, you know? Couldn’t risk any loose ends or connections back to what went on tonight.” He was still catching his breath, sweat dripping from his slick hair.

Am I a loose end? Raury was struggling to balance his trust in Creed with an overabundance of caution and self-interest. Within the walls of Clarendon Hill, there was a certain level of comfort and accommodation—safety, even—that Raury currently longed for. He had given up a steady meal, a roof over his head, and a firm bed that he actually preferred over any mattress he ever had before he was sentenced there. *And chocolate mint pudding.* Besides the creature comforts, he had also given up the care of Clarendon Hill’s friendly staff and security team tasked to protect its residents from themselves, and from each other.

Creed stood up tall, a wave of cool seeming to sweep him over now that things were, for the moment, looking up. In a semi-daze and with his senses muted by the dense darkness of the forest at this hour, Raury hardly saw him move closer. Creed put a hand around the back of Raury’s neck and pulled him face-to-face in a flash. All Raury could see in a single glint of moonlight that snuck its way through the trees was a crazed look in the man’s widened eyes. “You *there*? Canada! Sound good? This isn’t the time to lose focus, man, the hardest part is done.”

“Yeah. Canada. Creed, that’s great. That’ll be a while on foot, though. We’ll need things. Snacks and supplies.” He tried to sound chipper in spite of the smell of salt and wet leather that Creed assailed him with. “Food, water, a change of clothes.” Clarendon

Hill tried to craft the image that its residents were *guests* rather than inmates, so it's not like they were sneaking around in bright orange jumpsuits. A uniform is a uniform though, and anyone they ran into over the next few days would recognize their forest green long-sleeved t-shirts and khaki workpants in an instant, especially after the news spread like wildfire in the morning and everyone for miles and miles was on high alert. The *CH* logo on their shirts didn't help. Neither did the skids of dirt, the torn away bits of fabric, or potent stench. "I bet *Escapee* is the name of some fancy cologne," Raury tried, sniffing himself, "maybe I'll get you a bottle for Christmas."

"Look," Creed smiled, still holding Raury close. "You took care all of the heavy lifting back there." He nodded in the general direction of where they had come from. "Knocking out security cameras *and* some security guards to boot, man! You are truly my hero. No doubt anyone with sense would give you credit for our escape from Clarendon Hill."

Credit? Raury had participated in something with permanent and inescapable consequences that would probably shape the rest of his life, and he could come to terms with that. What he hadn't settled on was how much responsibility he was willing to take.

"Point is, you let me handle it from here on out. I got us taken care of. There are a couple of farms that I think I'm getting us in the general direction of. Even those early bird types won't be getting up for another couple of hours to reap and harvest their worms. If we make moves, we might be able to borrow a few things on our way through. And look, what you did with the guards was fine work, but let's avoid any of that messiness now.

We don't need to draw any more attention to ourselves."

THWOT, THWOT, THWOT, THWOT, THWOT!

"Shit," they both said at the same time. "Helicopter."

Zaric and Marybeth, Now

THWOT, THWOT, THWOT, THWOT, THWOT!

Zaric shot up in bed. "What the hell," he grumbled to nobody, until his wife woke up from the commotion, and then he said it again. "What the hell is a helicopter doing 'round here at this hour?" His bedside clock read 2:57 AM.

"You don't think?" Marybeth said.

"Shit," they both said at the same time. "The 'sylum."

They were both out of bed and fully dressed in their matching flannel pajamas in no time. "Get the kids. I'll check the radio, make sure that chopper's business is what we're pretty sure it is." Zaric had a police dispatch radio scanner in the small mess of a room that he referred to as his office that he checked once in a while (maybe more than that lately; Marybeth had been complaining that he spent too much time "eavesdropping on our boys in blue" just earlier this week) to see what sort of things were endangering their neck of the woods.

All they usually had to worry about was the occasional speeder trying to get through their stretched out small town faster than the law said they could. A

whiskyfueled domestic dispute here and there. Not now though, a helicopter meant business.

Let's see her complain now. He adjusted the radio dial, searching for anything but static.

Marybeth appeared in his office like a hot blast of wind. "Honey, there's a *SEARCHLIGHT* on that helicopter. I don't think you need to waste any more time with that thing for us to know it's time to get going."

Just then, he picked something up –

"...SEVERAL SUSPECTS DUE NORTHEAST OF THE FACILITY. KEEP EYES ON LOCAL PROPERTIES JUST BEYOND THE PINES..."

"Honey, let's go!" she commanded.

Zaric and Marybeth rushed into the hallway to their zombie-like 7-year-old son and 5-year-old daughter, both still trying to rub the sleep and confusion from their eyes but only getting so far. "Good kids," Zaric said in his most calming fatherly cadence. "There's no need to worry, everything'll be alright. That's why we make plans. We're heading up the road to the O'Bryan's place."

"I've already called them, they're ready," Marybeth confirmed.

Zaric flashed a stoic, closed-mouth smile her way and then squatted down face-to-face with his children. "Some of them crazies from down the way finally got loose, just how we always worried they would. You remember our plan for that, don't you?"

They looked at him, focused and awake now, and nodded.

Raury, Now

The dense population of trees had provided exceptional cover, but Raury and Creed weren't taking any chances. When they approached a clearing after a quiet, hurried race through the forest, they were purposefully covered in layers of camouflaging mud and dirt. The caked-on twigs, pinecones and needles were happenstance additions to their disguises collected along the way.

Raury pointed to a barn and stable just beyond a fenced-in grazing pasture that stood between them and the structures. Creed shook his head and whispered, "If there are animals in there, they might make a fuss about us or start cheering us on in their own way thinking we're there to serve breakfast."

"Right, right. Okay. What then? Lights are all still out, that's good," he said nodding towards the house.

"Look, there's no reason we both have to compromise ourselves. One robber is quieter than two anyway, especially when the second is a Sasquatch like you. Let's get a little closer. You hide out in those bushes and get cozy. I'll try to get in and get what I can for our little northbound road trip."

The two escapees approached the property commando style with an all-elbows-and-knees crawl so that the moonlight wouldn't betray their stealth with silhouettes that would be visible from the house. They reached the line of bushes that served as their checkpoint, close enough to the house that they could see through the windows.

Everything was going according to plan.

Until it wasn't. Raury sat tight behind those bushes for what felt like forever, and he figured sunrise would begin creeping its way up soon. *What's taking so damn long. Maybe he's in danger. Maybe he ditched me. Fuck.*

Raury considered that he shouldn't let his fate be such a passive experience. The night music still largely consisted of crickets complimented by the huffs and puffs of a few barn animals that shifted in their sleep. That was a good sign. If something had gone terribly wrong, he would have heard some kind of commotion. Still, if things had gone terribly right, Creed would probably be back by now. Raury couldn't wait anymore, couldn't waste more time thinking and hoping for the best. He popped his head above the bush line and darted his eyes from window to window – no lights, no movement.

What was that? Raury focused on a large room at the back of the house, letting his eyes adjust. He was certain it was the kitchen, and he was sure now that he could see a figure shuffling around it. *Creed. That's where he'd be.*

Raury hoped that this figure was his companion, but he wasn't going to make the mistake of counting on it. He slowly crept around the front side of the house to enter that way rather than risk the assumption that Creed was in the kitchen and would let him in the back door – he didn't want to accidentally reveal himself to a resident getting a late-night glass of water. Once he crawled close enough to the house, he got to his feet and hunched over so that his head would be below the uniform height of the home's

windows. From there, he inched towards the front of the house while staying flush against its sides.

Despite the fact that he was working slowly in the cool night air, Raury had worked up a significant sweat (for about the one hundredth time tonight) by time he reached the front door. He stood for a moment with his back against the house next to the front door to let his nerves reset. As he took a few slow and deep breaths, the front door creaked open. His nerves did not reset but instead leveraged his cooling sweat to fuel eye-widening electric shivers from head to toe.

THWOT, THWOT, THWOT, THWOT!

Another helicopter hummed from somewhere beyond the pines. It didn't sound far away and was only getting closer – Raury could see its searchlight assaulting the peaceful Vermont landscape. The escapee was out in the open, the light-yellow house perfectly contrasting his dirt-covered body to highlight it from a bird's eye view. In that moment – those few seconds that felt like an eternity – Raury calculated that he had no choice. *Looks like I'm going in and going in now.*

To Raury's confusion, the door then closed the few inches it had advanced a moment ago. Then popped back open again. Then closed. Nobody was exiting the house as Raury had feared, but he was newly concerned about Creed's evident lack of caution in not closing the door all the way. This concern was deepened when he entered the house, softly clicking the door shut behind him, only to hear a careless amount of noise coming from the kitchen. The sounds of cupboards being hastily opened and then swung shut,

drawers behind pulled out and shoved back in with enough force to jangle the silverware and utensils within them, all complimented by audible expressions of excitement or disappointment based on the discovered contents.

He tiptoed into the kitchen to see that the ruckus was indeed being generated by Creed. He put a finger to his lips in a “shh” fashion and stepped into the center of the room with his eyes furled in a way that he hoped communicated his anger.

“Raury, my man! No need to shush me. It’s our lucky day. We’re the only ones here. Every bed, every room is empty. And did you notice out front? They left their car, just for us. I already found the keys.”

“And you didn’t think to come get me? You might want to close the front door all the way next time you break into a house, by the way, so the whole neighborhood doesn’t wake up when the wind slams it shut. I can’t believe you want to add grand theft auto to our list of offenses. We can’t steal a car. No.” Raury already felt in too deep, and his panic and sense of dread climaxed as he saw his criminal culpability snowballing in Creed’s company.

“Relax big guy, easy does it. I had to take my time creeping around to check every room for people, pets, whatever. I’ve only had the place cleared and started raiding the kitchen for like five minutes. I got something special for you, *by the way*. Front door? I didn’t come *in* through the front door.”

A helicopter’s spotlight passed over the house and illuminated the entirety of the kitchen for an instant. Both men paused the conversation and reflexively ducked. What

was a dark room – there wasn't a single light on in the house, in fact – was momentarily displayed in its full color and messy glory. There were earthy delights scattered across the floor from the escapees' crumbling camouflage and the immediate vicinity was in general disarray, décor and furniture noticeably roughed up and out of place. The cherry on top of this briefly highlighted disastrous scene, disturbingly similar in color to that tiny treat of a stone fruit, was a large crimson stain that began on the kitchen floor and streaked off toward the living room where Raury entered the house.

In stark contrast to the mess of everything was Creed himself. He was showered and his hair was cut short, the facial scruff he had had was shaved clean with the exception of an unimpressive mustache, and he was in a new change of clothes – a pair of well-worn jeans and an old t-shirt that commemorated a chili-based fundraiser for the local police department. He looked like he had been in the eye of a storm that ravaged this modest home. Raury saw Creed as the storm itself.

The spotlight moved on. The house went dark again.

Creed said, "Raury." He took a step forward, both hands held up as white flags.

"You left out some details on what checking for 'people, pets, *whatever*' included. I knocked out a couple of guards to get us out of Clarendon Hill and you said you wanted to avoid *that!* kind messiness from here on out. Well, what is *this!* messiness? Whose blood is that?" Now it was Raury that took a step forward, both hands held at his sides balled into tight fists.

“That blood is as surprising and unnerving to me as it is to you, man. I don’t like this. Look, let’s get out of here.” Creed reached into his pocket and jangled the car keys that he brought out from it. “Sorry I didn’t tell you I freshened up, but c’mon, I had to. You do too. I got you a change of clothes that I hope is big enough for you, and I got you a towel and some wipes to clean up with. The next phase of our journey will be in daylight. At first we had to blend in with darkness and trees and now we’ll have to blend in with society.”

“I’m not just going along with your plans anymore. If I get caught, I’m fine being charged with what I did. I broke out of Clarendon Hill and hurt a couple of people in the process, sure. But I’m not a murderer and I won’t be an accomplice to it.”

“Raury. I know we’ve had a wild night, but I’m your friend. Right? We’ve been through a lot together, you know me, and suddenly you can think I’m a murderer? You know I wouldn’t hurt anyone.”

“Let’s see about that.” Raury reached out and flicked a light switch on the wall. The kitchen lit up and provided visibility to the adjacent living room. Both men looked at the streak of blood and followed it with their eyes to a closet in the front of the house.

Another wave of shock flowed over Raury, but this time it had a numbing effect. His fists eased and his focus on Creed loosened as he made his way towards the closet. The closer he got to the closet door, the more the red streak of blood became a nearblack puddle of it. He stared at the puddle and then opened the door.

Creed’s hand on his shoulder made him jump.

“We don’t have to do this. Let’s walk out that front door right now, get in that car, and go start our new lives. It’s probably best if we never find out what’s in that closet.”

“We.” Raury opened the closet. A man wearing nothing but socks, underwear, a coat of his own blood and a wide red smile slumped clumsily and motionless on the floor. *Oh god, that’s his neck.*

“This is,” Creed said right before he dry-heaved. “This is messed up.”

A car pulled into the driveway and the two men now viewed the interior of the house in an alternation of blue and red hues.

“This is so messed up.” Creed elaborated. The dancing colors of the law were not complimented by the typical wailing of a siren, and both men were thankful for it.

“I’m not going to jail for this,” Raury said pointing at the man whose throat was slit. “I didn’t do this. I’m going out there right now and turning myself in. I’m telling them everything.”

“No,” Creed said. He took the pack that he had been using to collect his kitchen loot off his shoulder and shoved it into Raury’s arms. “I’m dressed like the dad; I’m wearing his clothes, a *police fundraiser shirt* for crying out loud, and I even did my facial hair up like his. I saw him in a few of the pictures they had hanging around. You know I’m always one step ahead. The cops will knock, I’ll say ‘How can I help you, officers? – No disturbances here good sirs – Oh no – That’s awful – No, we haven’t seen any escaped criminals from the looney bin – Good luck hunting them down, I know you’ll get them soon’ and then they’ll be on their way.”

Raury was looking at a man that seemed high on adrenaline, seemed giddy to be in what certainly had to be the worst situation either of them had ever been in. He was looking at a man that never ceased to amaze him. He was looking a man that he once considered a significant friend but now considered dangerous and untrustworthy. He was looking at a man that appeared to live here, unlike Raury himself, still covered in mud and dirt and twigs and wearing his Clarendon Hill getup. Nevertheless, he was looking at a man that handled precarious situations much more deftly than himself and that was giving him a chance to continue his pursuit of freedom.

“Okay,” Raury said. “But I’m splitting once we get to Canada.”

Creed’s excitement was curbed by this. “Just in case, sneak out the back door and listen in until the cops are gone. I’ll come get you once the coast is clear. If you hear things go south, just book it for the trees.”

Raury followed the plan precisely. He gently closed the door at the back of the house and stooped under the kitchen sink window. The window was cracked, and the house was small enough that he figured he could hear the entirety of the upcoming conversation at the front door.

Creed, Now

A few moments passed and then the silence was interrupted by three thunderous knocks.

Creed cracked the door open enough to seem welcoming but not enough to offer a view beyond his body. He was thankful that the kitchen light only dimly lit the bloodied living room, and that the door opened up to the opposite side of the room from the corpse closet. "Good morning officer," Creed said. He feigned a yawn to sell his act, but it quickly became the real thing. *It's been a long night.*

"That's my shirt," the officer said. His own uniform looked like it fit a bit too tight, but Creed thought maybe the police department up here didn't have the budget to get new uniforms as quickly as a man could put on a few pounds.

"Excuse me? Oh," Creed chuckled. "Were you at the Chili Fest that year too? Sorry, I'm not great with faces and I'm especially not my sharpest at this hour."

"I suppose it's only fair that we both get to play pretend tonight. *I* get to play the role of one of the boys in blue, and hey, maybe they'll even let me join the force for real after catching a crazy convict tonight. I hear they have an opening." On the latter point, he winked at Creed as if they both knew what he was talking about. Creed didn't like it.

"Look, sir, I really don't know what you're talking about. Crazy convict? Did something happen up at Clarendon Hill?"

The uniformed man continued, "And *you* get to play the role of a free man. You're doing a good job of it too, Zaric." He looked Creed over and gave him a sly smile that quickly metamorphosed into a chilling deadpan. "Except it's about time we ended the charade. You're not Zaric. That's *me*. *You* are a menace from that 'sylum that never should've been built around here. I'm actually glad a bunch of you got out – lets us local

folk take matters into our own hands.” Although he stood outside of the doorframe, he nodded in the direction of the living room where the body was stashed, “and *that* is the officer that you murdered before you tried to kill me and my family, too. Good thing I stopped you.”

Creed said “It... it was you? That’s a police officer in there? What the *hell* is wrong with you?”

“Give it up. Your little escapade is over. The only way you might buy yourself some time is if there are any more of you around here and you help me flush them out. We’ve got the place surrounded; there’s nowhere they can go anyway. So?”

Raury, Now

This was not going according to plan. Raury was confused and terrified. He shifted onto his knees to make a break for the forest. As he broke his attention from the conversation inside, he noticed that he was not alone. Two children, a small boy and a smaller girl, had flanked either side of him. They each had a pistol held steady on him.

Then the echoing explosion of a gunshot erupted from within the house.

Creed, Then

“You seem like you pretty much have it all together,” Raury complimented Creed as they ate in the cafeteria at Clarendon Hill after a couple days of their budding friendship. “So why are you in here? I myself, well, I meant to rough a couple kids up that had been bullying my little nephew. To teach them a lesson, you know, get them off his

back. Only thing is, I roughed them up a little bit more than planned. Sometimes when I get too worked up, I kind of go blank and get carried away. Sometimes it's good and sometimes, a few too many times evidently," he gestured generally to the space they occupied, "it's bad." Creed could tell that Raury felt relieved to be talking about this, to have someone to talk to at all.

Creed liked Raury and trusted him too, but he dreaded this inevitable conversation. He knew that he might be at Clarendon Hill for a while and he wanted to get along fine, make friends, make plans, and be looked up to. He didn't want to be known as the guy that sunk so low and spiraled out so many times just trying to get by that his fifth attempt to take his own life landed him in here.

"I shouldn't say," Creed smiled. "I wouldn't want to scare you away. After all, we've got a lot of time we need to spend together here whether you like it or not, and I'd prefer you like it."

"That sounds like the better of the two options," Raury said. "And if you're to like it, too, I guess you better not say anything rude about my nephew." "The *fat* one or the *stupid* one?"

They both laughed.

Raury, Now

Both children turned toward the house at the sound of gunfire, and Raury didn't let the opportunity escape him. He felt as if someone somehow bypassed his skin and muscles and ribcage to punch him directly in the heart, but he moved. He sprinted for the

trees. He ran across the property's grazing pasture and past the barn and stable where a cacophony of panicked farm animals responded to the gunshot.

Raury ran and ran, and he swore that his feet would have to be amputated from overwork if they didn't fall off on their own in protest.

Enough time and distance had passed for Raury to feel safe, and his sense of comfort was only strengthened by the full morning sun. *Nobody would shoot someone in broad daylight. That kind of thing is for the night.* He found the biggest clearing he could and sat right in the center of it.

Now that all of the clear and present dangers of the evening had come to pass, Raury's body decided it was finally an appropriate time to remind him that it needed food. Raury received the message, and his body was grateful that he was willing to humor its base needs in exchange for humoring all of his running and running and running.

He took the pack that Creed had given him off of his back and assessed its contents. It was a good haul, but one thing caught his eye above all else. "I got something special for you," Creed had said. *Chocolate mint pudding.* He ate the whole six-pack in one sitting. The delicacy tasted saltier than he remembered.

A search helicopter finally flew overhead. He was relieved.

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